

munities still, as in the past, have a role to fulfil; namely, as "places where we keep trying to invent improved versions of ourselves so we can survive and evolve as a species" (17). Such a sentiment echoes the convictions of

Sointula's founder Matti Kurikka (1863-1915), who had in turn drawn upon the thought of Owen, Fourier, and Saint-Simon. It would appear the utopian tradition still thrives in British Columbia as part of a long heritage.

Totem Poles and Tea

Hughina Harold

Surrey: Heritage, 1996. 218 pp. Illus., maps. \$17.95 paper.

No Path But My Own:

Horseback Adventures in the Chilcotin and the Rockies

Cliff Kopas with Leslie Kopas

Madiera Park: Harbour, 1996. 225 pp. Illus., maps. \$26.95 cloth.

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Each year, small publishers across British Columbia put out popular first-person accounts of British Columbia's past. Hughina Harold's *Totem Poles and Tea* and Cliff Kopas's *No Path But My Own* are two such offerings. These books, via small bookstores and tourist centres, present British Columbia's history to a wide, international audience. For many readers, they represent British Columbia's past more so than any newly published monograph or even a handily written survey text. And so it is right that we question the images they present, the stories they tell.

Taking *No Path But My Own* and *Totem Poles and Tea* as examples, we see that the travel narrative is still an important form in popular historical writing. They offer us views of our

past that are both useful and imaginative, that are potentially disruptive of traditional interpretations yet also constitutive of them. Assessing these books as history means coming to terms with the travelogue genre and the gendered and racialized meanings this genre creates.

Both books are set in the 1930s and involve young adults who come to maturity on the "frontiers" of non-Native BC society. *Totem Poles and Tea* centres around Hughina Harold's work as a nurse-schoolteacher with the Mamalilikulla people of Village Island. Compelled by the belief that she "had witnessed things that should not be forgotten," Harold revisited the letters she wrote to her mother at the time and compiled them into a seamless narrative. The result is a detailed picture of her relationships both with

the Kwakwaka'wakw, of whom the Mamalilikulla are part, and with the non-Native settlers in the area.

Harold seems both fascinated and repelled by the Kwakwaka'wakw. On the one hand, she describes their cultural lives as haunted by the ban on the potlatch and marvels at their resilience. On the other, her occupational focus on ill-health highlights the devastation of tuberculosis among the First Nations and seems to legitimate negative assessment of Kwakwaka'wakw commitment to hygiene and public health. Though never really comes to terms with Kwakwaka'wakw priorities, attitudes, or lifestyles, she does come to appreciate individuals as kind-hearted, competent, and quick-witted. More than once, the bravery and graciousness of her First Nations hosts ensured her safe passage across the treacherous waters of northern Vancouver Island, a point that Harold often misses as she recounts these events only from her own perspective as a terrified passenger. There is much to be gleaned here about reserve life of the 1930s by sometimes reading around the autobiographical focus.

Of her non-Native contemporaries, Harold is more uniformly sympathetic. She presents a comic yet poignant picture of the lives of long-time missionaries Kathleen O'Brien and Kate Dibben. She also tells the stories of the settlers of northern Vancouver Island and the central coast with great care. Clearly, she met some strong-willed and fascinating people and, as a source of their history, *Totem Poles and Tea* stands out. As an autobiographical account of one woman's journey into First Nations territory, *Totem Poles and Tea* exemplifies the alienation and personal growth that some women experienced as they

ventured out into the cross-cultural "border zones" of British Columbia.

Cliff Kopas's stories are more firmly situated in his on-going assimilation into "frontier" life. *No Path But My Own* is a compilation of four travelogues connected by autobiographical "interludes" depicting Kopas's life between journeys. The magnificence of British Columbia's landscape figures prominently in Kopas's narrative, and the hardships of trail life, though starkly presented, never overwhelm the sense of excitement and exhilaration of the journey. Packhorsing through the Rockies and the Chilcotin, Kopas's story is a classic "man-against-nature-coming-of-age" saga. Beginning as a recovering invalid, through physical hardship he exhibits his masculinity and becomes a "chief" of the trail. The interludes are the only places where we hear about Kopas's personal life, his domestic existence, the birth of his children, the death of his first wife. Domesticity is abandoned, it seems, only to be replicated on the trail where young men collect the wood and cook the meals. Kopas clearly thrived on the trail and, though this book ends with the birth of his second son, the epilogue makes it clear that the Bella Coola valley and the Chilcotin plateau remained a central part of Kopas's life for many years.

The books have some things in common. In both, medical care provides a central stage for cultural interaction, and it is from this perspective that we see the unevenness of that exchange. Harold's account makes clear the imperial nature of social welfare, as she is enjoined to raise the Union Jack each morning before school. As she puts it, "Obviously, THE FLAG was critical to the smooth running of the mission" (29). But there is

sarcasm in her tone, and more seemingly useful was the vigilance implied in tooth-brushing and nose-blowing drills. For Harold is nothing if not persistent in her attempts to enforce non-Native habits of hygiene on the Mamalilikulla people and to dislodge their own healers. She takes great delight in "treating" the groaning wife of a respected healer with an enema, aspirins, and scotch mints and does not see the irony in performing such "heroic" measures before she has diagnosed the problem. Though she scoffs at the cedar boughs and eagle feathers of the healer's materia medica, her own offerings are only marginally more "scientific."

Kopas observes the application of missionary medicine, although he is less directly involved. For him, the ministrations of the dour Dr McLean seem crude and ritualistic – a tooth pulled here and there, some general anesthetic administered, but few lives saved mainly because the truly sick avoid the hospital and even those who allow themselves to be admitted are discharged once they become "chronic." Saving lives seemed of less importance, in Kopas's telling, than appearing to do so. Unlike Harold, Kopas is cynical about the "benefits" of Western medicine, recommending instead the therapy of trail life.

Both books are primarily stories of self-discovery. For Harold, this means entering a frontier of caring in which she is "made a woman" by extending the maternalism of her profession beyond the bounds of what, in different circumstances, would have been deemed appropriate feminine behaviour. Like many women travel writers' narratives, there are no panoramic vistas but, instead, the interior view of relationships, conversations,

feelings. In this, as Sara Mills has shown, women's travel writing is transgressive in that it removes colonialism from the realm of politics, makes explicit the connections between the "colonizers" and the "colonized," and, in so doing, disrupts that binary opposition. At the same time, however, the focus on the personal defines such writing as "women's writing," in which an emphasis on the feminine contains any disruption of gender roles that might be imagined. We can see this clearly with Harold's story. Her life on Village Island must surely have required courage and resolve, yet she never portrays herself in any way that might be construed as masculine, as breaking gender roles. She is "plucky," not resolute; she might brave passage aboard a canoe across a dangerous stretch of ocean, but she still requires the men to help her from the craft. In the end, Harold's story is told entirely from the perspective of having left that community and having become reintegrated into mainstream society, leaving nursing, marrying a doctor, and retiring to housewifery. For Harold, her life with the Mamalilikulla must be nothing but an interlude, a premarital adventure.

On the other hand, Cliff Kopas is able to embrace his adventures – indeed, make a life out of them – precisely because trail life enhances his gender role rather than challenging it. Time after time Kopas must meet the challenges of the trail and show himself to be a man within a community of "frontier" men who thrive under harsh conditions. What is shadowy in Kopas's narrative is precisely that which grounds Harold's in the feminine world. Kopas shuns the domestic so much that the text defines his relationships with women

and children, indeed his whole home life, as "interludes." The contrast between the level of detail about Dr McLean's treatment of the Ulkatcho Carrier and the absence of that detail in the section documenting the death during childbirth of Kopas's first wife, Ruth, is strikingly eerie. So is Kopas's depiction of how "Ruth's son" was adopted out shortly after birth. This was, of course, his son, too, and yet his description of the surrounding events is detached, alienated, disturbing. Even so, *No Path But My Own* does foreground other relationships. Despite the title, and the cover art that shows a single man with a packhorse surveying the plateau, Kopas never attempted any of his journeys on his own. Always there was at least one other man, and we can follow Kopas's absorption into the network of male relationships that spans culture and class boundaries in an area defined as "frontier." As such, Kopas's narrative permits the reader to break the connection between

"masculine" and "atomized" so often evident in depictions of "frontier" life and to see relational networks as key to men's survival as well as to women's.

Totem Poles and Tea and *No Path But My Own* remind us of the views of British Columbia to which the wider audience are exposed through some popular histories, including romantic images of hardship, stunning depictions of a terrifying yet magnificent environment, and primitive, disadvantaged First Nations. At first, these seem to be entertaining but retrogressive accounts of our province's past. It is possible, however, to see the contradictions in these books, to apply a gendered analysis that might prove useful in uncovering the lurking remainders of suppressed perspectives. As texts they tell us a great deal about the past and how we have come to know it, and this is, perhaps, a greater contribution to our field than the addition of more empirical data. *Totem Poles and Tea* and *No Path But My Own* are well worth reading.